

Movie Makers

September—October, 2002

Volume 12 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

73rd Annual American International Film and Video Festival Competition Results

The judging for the 73rd Annual American International Film and Video Festival is completed. A big thank you goes out to the judges who spent much time watching the entries.

First held in New York City in 1930, The American International Film and Video Festival is the oldest such event in the world. The American Motion Picture Society was organized to perpetuate the festival.

For the second year in a row, the judging was hosted by Cameron University's Communication Department. The use of space and equipment in order to view the entries is greatly appreciated. Matt Jenkins was the festival chair.

First Place - Mark Levy
"Nature Calls"

Second Place - Timothy Burke
"Helping Hands"

Third Place/Best Story Picture
Matt Fore "Through the Looking Glass"

Top Ten-Ned Cordery "South by Southwest"

Top Ten/Best Club Entry- L.A. Cinema Club "A Dead Issue"

Top Ten Mark Levy-"How's It Growin'"

Top Ten/Best Documentary-Joyce Axelrod "Taking a Stand"

Top Ten-Bill and Mary Ann Leeder "The Bikes of Beijing"

Top Ten- Stan Whatsitt
"Gumfudgin'"

Top Ten/Best Nature- Carmen Goodyear/Laurie York
"Jelly"

Top Ten/Best Editing- Colin Pate "Technical Skater"

Top Ten-Roger Garretson
"The Fabric of America"

Best Foreign Entry - Oskar Siebert "Ivana Koubeck"

The judges did not decide on a best experimental entry as they felt that there was not one that fit the category.

Congratulations to the winners!

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Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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From The Editor

Since you are reading this the convention in San Diego is over. It was great wasn't it? Actually I am writing this in early September and I have just finished organizing the judging for the AMPS festival. While I will not be serving as a judge, I look forward to seeing each entry.

The number of entries dropped this year when compared to last year. I suspect there are a variety of reasons for this drop. Maybe the competition was not advertised enough. Certainly there were entrants who were displeased with the way the festival judging was conducted last year and maybe they decided not to enter this year.

And even though only having to oversee the smaller number of entries makes my life easier, I am concerned about the future of this competition. I hope AMPS members will have had a chance to discuss this important topic at the convention.

After the convention I am headed back to the East coast to finish my documentary on the U.S.S. Nautilus. I am looking forward to that trip as well.

My ambition has to make fic-

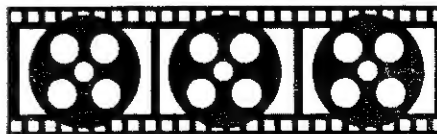
tional movies or "scenarios." However, it seems I always drift back into documentary production.

I thought I would be the next James Cameron. What fun, to make movies. It's just that I love history and to talk with people who actually lived an exciting life and to have actual historical footage or stills to use with the discussions really excites me.

I know that there has been at least three documentaries produced over the Nautilus and yet I want to produce my own program. Hopefully, mine will cover a different angle.

In the United States, there isn't much of a market for documentaries. The big cable networks are really closed to but a few established producers. Documentaries generally do not generate the excitement a good movie does. Yet I love making documentaries and will keep making them.

As always you may e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu



American International Film and Video Festival Entrants

"Jelly"

Carmen Goodyear & Laurie
York

"Ave Maria"

Carmen Goodyear & Laurie
York

"Technical Skater"

Colin Pate

"Halloween 2001"

Denis Kirwan

"Jumbalia, Talk Show Host of
the Century"

Lauren Marcus

"The Fabric of America"

Roger Garretson

"Taking a Stand"

Joyce Axelrod

"Standing Ovation"

Joyce Axelrod

"Love"

Vadim Tchaadaen

"Ivana Koubek"

Oskar Siebert

"South by Southwest"

Ned Cordery

"Katz"

Jack Somers

"Santa and the IRS"

Wally Shaw

"Don't Go in the Water"

Wally Shaw

"Reflection on a Dynamic
City"

T. H. Sarchin

"Helping Hands"

Timothy Burke

"Movies I Never Made"

Ephraim Horowitz

"Getty"

Lee Agnew

"Nature Calls"

Mark Levy

"How's It Growin'"

Mark Levy

"The Art of Balance"

Westwood Video Club

"1WWF"

Stanley Smith

"Joe Rosenthal"

Stanley Smith

"The Bikes of Beijing"

Bill and Mary Ann Leeder

"Shanghai Talent Show"

Bill and Mary Ann Leeder

"Captain Ecology"

Jeffrey Mullen

"Blue Man/Orange Man"

Jeffrey Mullen

"A Dead Issue"

L.A. Cinema Club

"Reunion"

Walter Gilmore

"Daddy Wouldn't But Me a
Bow-Wow"

Walter Gilmore

"Anna's Room"

Matt Fore

"Cairo"

Darold & Gerdonna Wilson

"Reminiscing"

James Beach

"See What I See"

James Beach

"A Quiet Evening at Home"

Stan Whitsitt

"GumFudgin Unbound"

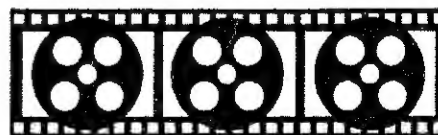
Stan Whitsitt

"Single Mom"

Howard Lockwood

"Through the Looking Glass"

Matt Fore



Some Will Like It, Some Won't.

Matt Jenkins

As I was deciding on a title for this article, I realized that the article's content would be similar to two articles I wrote in previous issues regarding judges' comments and specific productions. And I will write a third in that series once I begin festivaling my latest documentary. This article will deal with other producers' comments concerning my latest documentary. I have had the good fortune to meet and work with three producers, two who produce documentaries and a third who produces independent features and corporate videos.

First lets examine the documentary. Watermen have been dredging oysters on the Chesapeake Bay for hundreds of years. "Historical Treasures: Stories of Our Past: The Skipjack Kathryn" is the story of a hundred year old oyster dredging boat called the Kathryn. The Kathryn just completed her last season of dredging.

This documentary is the second in a series of programs covering historical structures. It is considered to be a broadcast half-hour (22 minutes) and is designed to air on

such channels as the History Channel and the Travel Channel. The documentary contains interviews and historical footage of the Chesapeake Bay.

It was shot with the Sony Mini-DV camera. In fact, the Kathryn's captain remarked how much he was impressed by the documentary after he viewed it. He explained that initially he hadn't expected much. Apparently, he had prior television interviewing experience, having been interviewed by both CBS and ABC production crews. These crews consisted of a large number of people who were carrying large cameras. And here comes Matt Jenkins wanting to shoot a documentary with a little min-DV cam. He was not impressed during the taping session.

I like the Sony min-DV camera. It takes a great picture, and is easy to carry on board an airplane.

The documentary then was edited on the AVID DV.

The first producer to provide comments has produced three award-winning documentaries. Some of these programs have aired on The Learning Channel. He also has a successful career in the film industry.

At first this producer didn't have much to say regarding the documentary. He was rather quiet. Then he re-

marked how he wanted to see the Kathryn actually dredge oysters. Good point. When the narrator was describing how the dredging process worked, I was showing shots of the dredging equipment and piles of oyster shells. My poor excuse for not including that kind of footage was, the Captain was finished dredging for the season and would only agree to take me sailing, not dredging. The first producer then asked me why didn't I videotape another boat dredging. He really felt this missing footage was a flaw.

I had kind of hoped that he would have said, "How brilliant it was not to show the actual dredging process. Since this was the boat's last dredging season, the lack of footage contributes to a sense of loss of this way of life." Yeah, I'll keep dreaming.

The second producer produces a successful series that airs on the History Channel. She indicated that she enjoyed the interviews and the videography of the boat under sail was nice. However, the piece needed more music. I purposely kept the use of music to a minimum. I have plenty of music to use but as anyone who loves sailing knows, the sounds of a boat under sail are relaxing. The sound of the wind filling the sails is a quiet but strong sound. It is hard to describe

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"Go Ahead And Make Your Own Movie"

Matt Jenkins

In picking up the Basic Guide for Camcorder Shooting pamphlet that came with my Panasonic camcorder, I looked over the reasons that were listed for using a camcorder.

Panasonic says to: *use your camcorder to record such family events as your children growing up, produce video letters to keep in "touch with family and friends," take photos and put them on video, take a travel video of your trip and use as a valuable learning aid to "view the instructor's example as many times as you like."*

That's it. Why couldn't there be a reason listed "to make your own movie?" With the advent of the home film camera and later the camcorder, it seems there has never been much encouragement for people to use this equipment to produce entertainment programming. The video camera is associated with producing training videos, taping weddings and capturing family moments. However, there are creative individuals who use video to produce movies.

A whole culture of moviemaking exists outside of mainstream-corporate-mass-mediated-entertainment-produced programming that is provided to the

viewer. These producers usually toil in anonymity and with little financial return. For those who create outside the mainstream of production, seeing their movie through to completion and trying to get their product in front of an audience is more of a calling than a vocation.

One low-budget shot-on-video movie producer, Pat Bishow of Amusement Films, recently shared his views on producing movies on video.

The production process can be overwhelming. However, when broken down into manageable steps, the task of creating a movie becomes an achievable goal. There is no right or wrong way to create a production. The best way is the method that gets the production completed in a timely and an efficient manner.

No matter how you break your production up into doable tasks, remember, each step is related to another. This article is separated into sub-sections; each with a heading. Each section can be considered to be a "step" for the producer to complete in a low-budget production. Not all producing aspects are covered here but this article serves as a good starting point for anyone considering making a movie using video equipment.

IDEA

A production has its start in the idea stage. It is an impossible task to describe how ideas are generated. However, an idea is essential before a script can be written or the rest of the production can made.

Do you know the time of day when you make the most decisions or are able to think the most clearly? Are you a morning person

or a night person? That's great if you know the time of day when you can easily be creative. You must expand this and learn to be creative and to generate ideas on demand. There are some simple tools you can use to help do this. Brainstorm with trusted friends or colleagues. If your idea is too broad, exchanging ideas with others will help you to focus on your project. The key to successful brainstorming is to initially accept every idea offered to you and then go back and eliminate choices based on time, equipment, amount of money and other constraints. Write down the idea you are interested in. Then as quickly as you can, write out as many concepts as possible that are associated with this main idea. Usually these associated words will steer you in the direction of the topic for your production.

Pat Bishow indicated that ideas often begin as little things that spiral into larger concepts. He bounces his ideas off of his friends and colleagues and then idea generation and script writing becomes a collaborative process.

EQUIPMENT

Deciding what equipment to use is critical to the success of any production. In the book *Directing the Documentary*, 3rd Edition, author Michael Rabiger suggests the following for dealing with equipment:

learn to shoot as simple as possible, learn all you can about the technical functions of your equipment and read all the equipment manuals.

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Low-budget producers wrestle with deciding to shoot on film versus shooting on video. Certainly money is a factor in any decision.

Pat wonders who wouldn't want to shoot on film rather on video. But he brings up the reality factor of producer's experience and the large expense associated with shooting on film.

ACQUIRING PROPS, LOCATIONS AND SPECIAL EFFECTS.

Another key to a successful low-budget production is keeping the costs down. A good low-budget producer will figure out unique ways to obtain props, find locations and create special effects.

Pat looks at what his friends have and has incorporated such things as an antique car and a Vespa scooter into his scenes. In order to keep expenses down, he suggests trying to use what you have around you in your movies.

ACTORS

Finding good actors to perform in low-budget productions is hard to do. Often local playhouses are a good place to find actors. Plenty of quality movies have been made using ordinary people who don't have any acting experience. The director must understand the characters in the script, find the appropriate person to fit that character and then be a gentle guide, bringing the character out in that person. Acting is not as easy as it reads on paper.

Trust is a big issue for Pat and his actors. At first he didn't trust his actors. Then Pat read about Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock saw actors as craftspeople and thought they should be allowed to

do their job. Pat had a complete change of attitude concerning actors and now he has total respect for them. He says it's tough to keep actors through the whole production. Don't be afraid to share your ideas and be sure to explain what you want from your actors on-screen.

AUDIENCE

Video productions are created so others may experience them. The audience should be considered throughout the pre-production, production and post-production phases. Often before writing a script, writers will write what is called a treatment or prospectus. This is a statement in paragraph form of what the production is about. In it the writer will include descriptions of characters, locations and discuss the story in great detail. In writing a treatment or prospectus, most script writing books indicate that there should be an analysis of who would be interested in watching your production. This audience analysis could include age range, gender, ethnic background and possible interests of the viewer. Knowing your audience will help you select appropriate words and phrases, music, shots and actors to place in the production.

Also, knowing your audience will help you to determine potential venues for showing your movie. By knowing your audience, you can find out what channels or programs they watch. Then you can make your production available to those outlets.

In many ways, Pat thinks his audience is similar to him. He also believes that people take a chance when they buy a copy of a low-budget production because

these productions are actually quite expensive to purchase. So whenever someone buys one of Pat's productions, Pat always thanks the person because he looks at the money as more of a donation to the cause than actually a purchase.

DISTRIBUTION

Getting the production in front of an audience is critical to its success. However, distribution is not often discussed and remains a frustrating aspect of production.

Possible ways to get your movie seen is to enter film/video festivals, have it air on such Internet sites as Shorttv.com, offer it to local television stations, show it on public access and try to get a distribution deal. While these alternatives have quickly been listed here, all methods involve much effort on the part of the producer.

A small company called Provisional called Pat and agreed to distribute Pat's movie called *The Adventures of El Frenetico and Go-Girl*. Pat found the people in this company very supportive. Provisional issued a sound track CD and managed to have Pat mentioned in *Variety* and listed on *Amazon.com*.

Hopefully Pat Bishow's comments will provide encouragement for other budding moviemakers. Making a movie is not an impossible task. Careful preparation and planning will greatly aid in your production. Keeping the idea simple and the number of characters and locations low will greatly enhance the possibility of the movie's success. And if nothing else, just maybe you will share Pat's passion for making movies.

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the wonderful sounds of a sailboat under way. Also what was striking to me was the sounds of birds all along the shoreline. It was a cold winter day and yet the loud chirping of birds could be heard everywhere. These particular sounds, I felt were critical to the documentary and I was afraid that music would drown them out. Plus, I had read somewhere that British moviemakers remarked that American moviemakers use too much music in their productions, drowning out the natural sounds. I do use music in the documentary, but only in key places.

The third producer independently creates productions. He lives and works in New York City. His remarks were very upbeat and he really seemed to enjoy the documentary. He was surprised that I was able to get on-camera interviews. He wanted to know how I was able to get the people to agree to be interviewed on-camera. He also thought the historical footage was fantastic. This third producer really didn't have anything negative to say.

In looking back over this production, I should have obtained some kind of dredging footage. I disagree with the idea that there was a lack of music. I kept the use of music to a minimum on purpose. I suppose these three

producers' comments reinforce the idea that no one viewer will see the same production in the same way.

Bye Bye Beta. by Jim Beach

Clear a space next to your old turntable, albums, and rotary telephones. Sony Corp. last week announced it will stop making Betamax videotape recorders—the nation's first VCRs—by year's end.

Betamax survived for 27 years, mostly in the shadow of the rival VHS system introduced here in the 1980s. But it couldn't keep up with tough new competitors. "With digital machines and other new recording formats taking hold in the market, demand has continued to decline and it has become difficult to secure parts," the company said.

Sony made only 2,800 units last year, a far cry from the 2.3 million it manufactured in 1984, Betamax's heyday, and the 18 million in its lifetime.

Sony says it will continue to offer repairs and manufacture Betamax tapes for the estimated 100,000 consumers who still use them. How long do you think that will last?

Peer Review. For several years there were peer review groups operating in AMMA and PSA. I participated in one called a Round Robin sponsored by AMMA. I haven't participated for some time as

other priorities prevailed. I don't know if they are still operating but I thought they were very useful and hope they still have participants. They provide a useful way to exchange constructive critiques on our movies from fellow amateur moviemakers.

The procedure I liked best was the Round Robin, I think Brenda Lantow started and ran. Participants had a certain time to send their movie to Brenda, she then dubbed them all onto a single tape and mailed it to the participants. They were to review the movies and provide a constructive critique to be mailed or emailed to the coordinator within a certain time period.

The coordinator would then combine the reviews and mail/email them to the participants. Useful comments and suggestions were often obtained. If you didn't agree, so be it, it was well intentioned and we never all see things alike anyway. Of course it was a bit of work for the coordinator and I appreciated that. There was a nominal fee to cover expenses.

Nothing beats our conventions and contests though, for exchanging opinions and considered judgments about our movies. When we have a good-sized attendance the audience reaction to a movie is often more useful than the judges comments.

See you in San Diego!

Visit the AMPS web-
site at:

[www.angelfire.
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